

September 8, 2019

The Rev. Dr. Morar Murray-Hayes



**Reading:** Jeremiah 18:1-11, Colossians 3:7-17

**The Message:** Life on the Potter's Wheel

"Go down to the potter's house ... "

One day, a prophet, seeking advice from God to deal with a rebellious people, heard these words: "Go down to the potter's house."

When God tells you to do something, even something that sounds, if not a waste of time, then at least ridiculous, well, you do it anyway.

You've likely seen how pots are thrown on the wheel just as Jeremiah would have, as the potter kneads a shapeless lump of clay, then pumps the wheel with a foot, bringing it to life, pouring water on it before beginning to mold the clay by hand, guiding it into a shape, judging its formation, breaking it down again and reforming it until it is pleasing to hand and eye.

The potter has a plan for the clay. Even in the shapeless form it starts out in, the potter 'sees' a finished pot, the texture, the shape, the colour -- even perhaps the use it will be put to.

The true potter loves the clay. Ah such potential! But things go wrong, the clay resists the plan, and so the hands of the potter break down the pot and begin again, molding, nudging the clay back into the plan.

God is telling Jeremiah how much God cares: enough to muck about with us when we misbehave. Yes God does get angry -- like a parent when one child the parent loves hurts another child the parent loves.

Did you ever do something intentionally hurtful to a brother or sister? Do you remember your parent's anger? Lots of times we remember it as 'she loved him better' when what was really happening was, the anger of one child you love hurting another child you love.

God loved the people Israel. God had a plan for Israel. Israel thought there was a better way than God's plan. God was angry in the short term, judged in the short term in order to coax the people back into God's loving plan.

Yes, Christians believe in a loving God. The Christian scriptures emphasize the forgiving, compassionate capacity of God's love. But we also learn that, when we mess up, God does get angry, because God does love us. God gets angry and judges peoples and nations who act in ways that dishonour our relationship with God, destroy the children God loves and subvert the loving plan God has for all humanity.

As a parent, or as a child of a parent, perhaps this image will help you to understand your own anger, or your parent's anger or God's anger.

And when your children or grandchildren make choices that are obviously not part of God's plan, perhaps you can help them to understand your judgement is a part of your love.

There are times when we disappoint God -- and the potter image gives us hope that God will rework us so that God's loving plan for our lives is realized.

Like the potter, God is forming, breaking down and building us up in a new way until, like the potter, God is satisfied with us, which in my experience usually takes our whole lives.

When God sends Jeremiah down to the potter's studio, God is reminding him and by extension us, just how mindful we should be about our relationship with God in all we do.

Jeremiah's story of the potter and the clay leaves open the possibility for hope. Even with all of the negatives on the horizon, Jeremiah's prophecy of disaster contains a positive message of hope indicating that God could begin to fashion his people Israel anew.

How do we live on this potter's wheel of life, being broken down in love and built up again? Live mindful of the gifts of God's grace.

Out of this incredible relationship we have with this loving God, Paul tells us what we need:

Clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another.

Dress in this wardrobe of gifts. And regardless of what else you put on, wear love. It's your basic, all purpose garment. Never be without it.